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A  
BOTANICAL,  
HISTORICAL  
AND  
ESTHETIC  
ACCOUNT OF  
THE  
FAVORITE  
FLOWER.

BY LUTHER HOOPER.

(Concluded from the October number.)

It has been affirmed by the poets and contradicted by the botanists, that this flower turns to the sun throughout his daily career. The well-known lines by Moore will occur to the reader:

"Oh, the heart that has truly loved never forgets,  
But as truly loves on to the close,  
As the sunflower turns to his god, when he sets,  
The same look that he turned when he rose."

Thomson, too, says:

"— the lofty follower of the sun  
Sad when he sets, shuts up her yellow leaves,  
Drooping all night, and when he warm returns,  
Points her enamoured bosom to his ray."

In such a detail as this, I think the poets are more likely to be correct than the botanists, and my observations rather go to support the poets. I believe if the flower were planted so as to be free to act, free, that is from the shade of tree or wall, it would turn its head to the sun. The only way to test this would be to plant the sunflower against a north wall, so that it might face the south and be free to turn east or west. My experimental plant was not placed in this favorable position, it could only peep at its "god" over the garden wall, but I noticed one peculiarity in its development which shows that it is greatly influenced by the sun; it was this, the rays of the flower nearest the south or sunny side, invariably come out first and gave a very distorted appearance to the half-opened flower head.

Although the sunflower grows to a fairly large size in Europe, reaching, without any cultivation or care, the height of eight or ten feet, it is far more imposing in its natural home, Central and South America. It grows there to the immense height of twenty feet, and is said to have excited the admiration and excitement of the Spanish conquerors of Mexico and Peru.

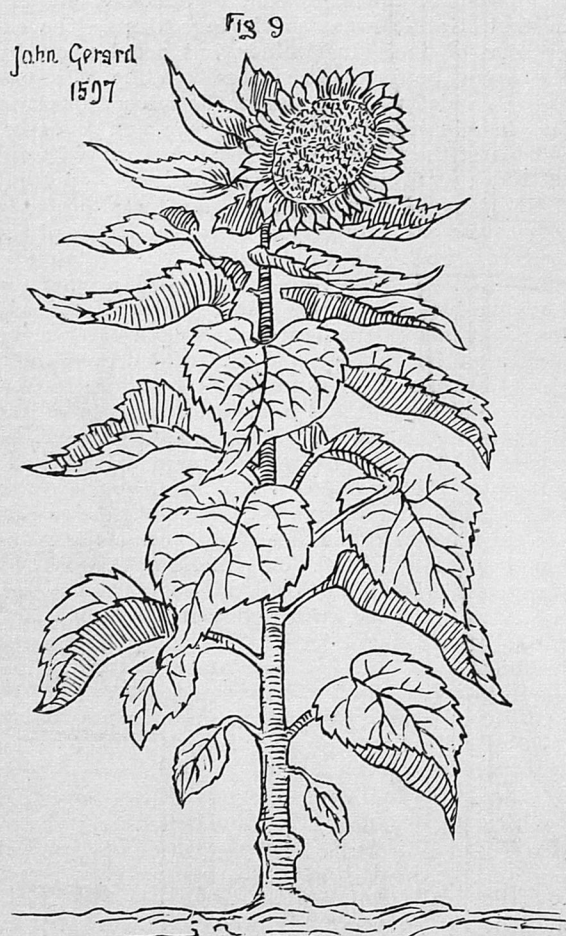
The thirteen species of *helianthus* distinguished by Linnaeus, are all of American origin. Even the one which he named *Helianthus Indicus* was a cultivated specimen from Egypt, and, no doubt, was originally introduced there from the New World. The annual sunflower especially, being easily propagated and growing very freely, soon became very general in Europe after its first introduction by the Spaniards, returning from their conquests in Peru.

I believe I am right in saying that there is no European representation of the sunflower of earlier date than 1597. In that year John Gerarde, surgeon, published an "Herbal of many common and curious plants, with figures of the same." He gives a very fine drawing of the plant under the name of "Flos Jolis," and mentions its introduction from America.

I have, at Fig. 9, copied Gerarde's drawing, and as the verbal description is rather curious, as contrasting with the modern way of describing plants scientifically, I quote it verbatim.

"The Indian sun, or goulden floure of Peru, is a plant of such stature and talness that in one sommir being sown of a seed in April, it hath risen to the height of fourteen foote in my garden, where one floure was in weight three pounds and two ounces, and cross overthwart the floure, by measure sixteen inches broad. The stalks are upright and strait, and of the bigness of a strong man's arm, beset with large leaves even to the top, like unto the great colt burr. At the top of the stalk cometh forth for the most part one floure, yet many times there spring out sucking buds which comes to no perfection; this great floure is in shape like unto the camomile floure, beset all round about with a pale or goodly border of yellow leaves, in shape like unto the leaves of the floures of white lillies, the middle part whereof is made as it were of unshorn velvet, or some curious cloth wrought with the needle, which brave work if you do thoroughly view and mark well, it seemeth to

"be an innumerable sort of small floures, resembling the noze or nozzle of a candlestick, broken from the foote thereof, from which small nozzle sweateth forth some excellent pine and cleare turpentine, in sight, savor, substance and taste. The whole plant in like manner being broken, smelleth of turpentine. Where the plant groweth to maturity the flowers fall away in place whereof appeareth the seed, black and large, much like the seed of gourds, set as though a cunning workman had of purpose placed them in very good order, much like the honeycomb of bees; the root is white, compact and of many strings, which perish at the approach of Winter, and must be set in most perfect manured ground.



"The manner, how shall be showed when upon the like occasion I come to speak of cucumbers and melons."

#### THE PLACE.

"These plants grow of themselves, without any setting or sowing, in Peru and divers other provinces of America, from whence the seeds have been brought into these parts of Europe. There hath been seen in Spain and other hot regions, a plant sown and nourished up from seed, to attain to the height of twenty-four foote in one year."

#### THE TIME.

"The seed must be set, or sown, in the beginning of April if the weather be temperate."

#### THE NAME.

"The floure of the sun is called in Latin, *Flos Solis*, taking that name because it doth resemble the radiant beams of the sun. Others have called it *Chrysanthemum Peruvian*, or golden floure of Peru."

#### THE TEMPERATURE.

"They are thought to be of a hot and dry complexion."

#### THE VIRTUES.

"These hath not been set down by any writers of the virtues of these plants, notwithstanding we have found by triall that the buds before they be floured, boiled or broiled on a gridiron and eaten, with oile, vinegar and pepper, are exceeding pleasant meat, surpassing the artichoke far in procuring bodily lust."

Thus Gerarde, writing so much nearer the time of the conquest of Peru than we are, describes what was evidently a rather rare plant, and attributes its origin to America, we may therefore, I think, conclude that there were no sunflowers in Europe previous to the discovery of America. This enables us to correct an error that many eminent painters and poets have fallen into with regard to this plant.

I happened some time ago, before I had confirmed it, to mention to a friend my belief that the sunflower was peculiar to America, and could not have been in Ancient Europe, when he reminded me of the story of Clytie, from Grecian Mythology, and kindly looked out for me the following extract from Ovid:

"Clytia, or Clytie, was a daughter of Oceanus, beloved by Apollo, she was deserted by her

"lover, who paid his addresses to another nymph, and this so irritated her that she discovered the whole of the intrigue to her rival's father. Apollo for this despised her the more. She pined away and was changed into a flower, commonly called a Sunflower, which still turns to the sun in his course as a pledge of her love."

This seemed conclusively contrary to my opinion, for of course if Clytie had been said to be changed into a sunflower, that flower must have been known in Ancient Greece. But on referring, I found that the *Heliotrope* was the sunflower of Ancient Greece. Dioscorides mentions and describes it. He says it is called *Heliotropeum*, because it turns its leaves round with the declining sun. Whether he means only the leaves of the plant or the corolla of the flower, may admit of a doubt, but the latter is generally supposed although they are very small and unobscure. Dioscorides' description is precise enough, and Ovid in his fable is vague, but not contradictory.

As I hinted just now, many poets and painters have fallen into the same error as my friend with regard to this flower. There is a beautiful painting by Annibal Carracci, which has been engraved, illustrating the Grecian style, it represents the nymph changing into an American Sunflower.

This error is evident in the quotations I have already given from Moore and Thomson. There is another from Smart:

"— A Sunflower—this, fair one's your due,  
For it was once a maiden and love sick like you.  
Oh, give me it quick, to my shepherd I'll run,  
As true to his flame as this flower to the sun."

Many instances of the same error might be given, but I will only mention one other. Mr. Alma Tadema, R.A., is supposed to be most particularly correct in all his details, and yet, in an important picture, painted and exhibited at the Royal Academy three or four years ago, he represents an Ancient Roman garden, crowded with American Sunflowers, which in fact gives the name to the picture. This is a manifest absurdity, and we may be pardoned for supposing that others of his boasted archaeological details are just as incorrect.

If we had no direct testimony of its exclusively American origin, the fact that there is no representation in Ancient European or Eastern art of so striking a flower, would be almost conclusive evidence that it was unknown. A flower which may at first sight be taken for the sunflower in Indian and Egyptian ancient art, turns out on examination to be the Lotus.

Soon after its introduction into Europe, the sunflower became common, and, like most common things, however beautiful or useful they may be, it was held in little esteem, although there have always been judicious admirers of it. A writer in a book on gardening in the last century says of the *Helianthus*: "All the plants that are reared by seed, have a very conspicuous and ornamental effect when placed backwards in the clumps, borders and other compartments of large pleasure grounds, and are capable of being sown at different times and kept in a succession of flowering for a very great length of time."

It was, however, mostly in the lovely little cottage gardens, for which England is celebrated, that the sunflower has been preserved as an ornament. A poet of the Eighteenth Century speaks of it in this connection:

"So fair each morn, so full of grace,  
Within their little garden reared,  
The flower of Phœbus turned her face  
To meet the power she loved and feared."

About the end of the last century it was discovered that there were various "vertues," as old Gerarde would have called them, in the sunflower. It was found that the seeds of the plant contained a large quantity of oil of the almond kind, which was useful in preparing wool for the loom and for many other purposes. Experiments were made in France and the East Indies with great success, in the cultivation of the flower for the purpose of obtaining the oil.

It is only within the last few years that the value of the sunflower for decoration and ornamental purposes has been duly recognized. This is rather remarkable, as we have seen that poets and painters had freely and duly admired it, ever since its introduction into Europe. Lately, however, the decorators and architects have begun to feel dissatisfied with lifeless imitation of bare historical forms and details, and have gone to nature for fresh inspiration. So that instead of a meaningless and nauseous repetition of Tudor Roses and Greek Honeysuckle, we find in our modern decorative art pleasing and truthful representations of most familiar and beautiful forms of plant life, and amongst these, most useful and appropriate in a great variety of ways, the sunflower appears.